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A Duel of Spies

There has never been any want of spy literature, factual or fictional. And many hours of good reading it has afforded, too — thrills, suspense, ingenious stunts, romance, all for country and for king. But it is becoming melancholy to find cloak-and-dagger books being reduced to mere propaganda, a kind of tit for tattle. Yet that is apparently what is happening. When a retired spy takes pen in hand, it is not just to relive his adventures and pass them on vicariously to others. He does it

because he or his country is trying to get even with some other country whose spy has told all.

Thus, the Russians are taking time out to gloat over a forthcoming book by one John Smith, formerly a CIA agent and now a Russian citizen, who reportedly is uncloaking the American spy system. Not long ago a Briton told how British intelligence had put one over on the Soviet Union. And before that Colonel Oleg Penkovsky, in the much challenged and resented "Penkovsky Papers," gave away secrets of the intelligence activities of the USSR.

And so it goes, each country trying to show how it is one up on another when it comes to the refinements of spying. It's a diplomatic equivalent of nose-thumbing. It isn't always a matter of books written. The same rivalry exists in the matter of defections in general. The United States, for example, rather thinks Russia is bringing up the supposed defection of Mr. J. Smith to get even with the story being told in America of the run-out of a Russian intelligence official, one Lieutenant Colonel Yevgeny Runge, a few weeks ago. One always thinks of spying as a touchy business, of course, but it is a little deflating to find that spies are now feared because they steal a nation's pride rather than its secrets.